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Titel: When the Future Comes to Town: Exposure to Frontier Technology and Innovation.

Abstract: Do encounters with frontier technology stimulate invention? I study major U.S. world's fairs—large, temporary exhibitions that brought the technological frontier into direct public view—and link their timing and location to geocoded patent records. I find that hosting a fair substantially increases local inventive activity. The effect operates along two margins: exhibitions draw new inventors into patenting and raise the productivity of incumbent inventors. The increase is concentrated in patent classes matched to exhibits and decays over distance to the host county. Further, I find increased local entry into inventive occupations from Census data. The results establish exposure as an independent driver of invention. Even brief encounters with frontier technologies broaden participation in innovation and increase the productivity of existing inventors.